

ecoNews — Wire —

IOWA DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES

October 30, 2003

For immediate release

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PUBLIC ENCOURAGED TO ATTEND ESTHERVILLE, FORT DODGE REGIONAL WATER QUALITY MEETINGS

DES MOINES — Two meetings remain on the DNR's schedule of regional water quality meetings. The DNR will present in Estherville tonight and in Fort Dodge Nov. 5.

The meetings will address general water quality issues, nutrients and Iowa's impaired waters, as well as include a presentation by DNR staff and an open public discussion. Each regional meeting will also highlight a local water quality project.

John Bird, Emmetsburg City Administrator, will present at the Estherville meeting on the Five Island Lake Restoration Project and its significance to the Emmetsburg area.

The West Buttrick Creek Watershed Demonstration Project will be highlighted at the Fort Dodge meeting. Todd Sutphin, agricultural environmental specialist with the Iowa Soybean Association, will present.

The public's ideas and input at the regional meetings will be taken to the Iowa Water Summit Nov. 24 in Ames. The governor's Iowa Water Summit is an unprecedented commitment to address impaired waters, and Governor Tom Vilsack has listed water quality as one of his top priorities.

“People have given us very sincere and open comments at every session so far. We’re really appreciative of that,” said Bernie Hoyer, special assistant to the director of the DNR.

The remaining two meetings are scheduled from 6:30 p.m. to 9:30 p.m. at the following locations and dates:

October 30, 2003

Iowa Lakes Community College
300 South 18th Street
Estherville, IA 51344
Auditorium

November 5, 2003

Webster County Extension Office
Bank of America Building, Second Floor
108 South 8th Street
Fort Dodge, IA 50501

The general agenda for each session:

6:30 p.m. Status of Water Quality and Water Quality Trends in Iowa
6:50 p.m. Iowa’s Nutrient Budget and Nutrients in Iowa’s Waters
7:10 p.m. Iowa’s Impaired Waters
7:30 p.m. Break
7:40 p.m. Local Water Quality Program
8:00 p.m. Public Participation
9:00 p.m. Adjourn

Those unable to attend the meetings or with further comments or questions can contact water.summit@dnr.state.ia.us.

Questions on local project presentations can be directed to:

Estherville: John Bird, (712) 852-4030.

Fort Dodge: Todd Sutphin, (515) 251-8640.

Media questions or comments should be directed to Bernie Hoyer (515) 281-7247 or Bernie.Hoyer@dnr.state.ia.us.

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PUBLIC COMMENTS SOUGHT FOR STATE WATER QUALITY ASSESSMENT METHODOLOGY

DES MOINES — The public has an opportunity to comment on the methods used by the Iowa DNR in assessing water quality and determining which waterbodies do not meet state water quality standards and are thus “impaired.”

“The proposed changes would make our methodology consistent with U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) guidelines. The proposals also are being refined based on the fact we have more information available to us today for assessments because of increased water monitoring,” said Chris VanGorp, an environmental specialist for the DNR.

The proposed changes would establish five categories to rate water bodies including:

- All designated uses (such as supporting aquatic life, swimming and/or suitable for use as drinking water) being met.
- Some of the uses are met, but there is insufficient data to determine if remaining uses are met.
- Insufficient data to determine whether any uses are met.
- Water is impaired, but a total maximum daily load (TMDL) study is not required.
- Water is impaired and a TMDL is needed (inclusion on the Impaired Waters List).

“This change will give us a more complete public accounting of water quality including places where water quality is good as opposed to just recognizing the ones that are bad,” said Van Gorp.

Other proposed changes in the methodology include:

- Assessing sedimentation impacts. This proposed addition to the methodology would address a current problem the state has in not having a water standard for sedimentation. The proposed change would use the methodology currently used by the state of Nebraska, essentially basing the determination of whether a man-made lake is impaired by sediment on if more than 25 percent of the lake’s volume has been lost.

“This is probably the one proposed change we would appreciate the most public comments on. I think everyone recognizes that sedimentation is a very serious problem on many of our lakes, finding an easy way of defining it in terms of an impairment is more difficult,” said VanGorp.

- Establishing a new threshold for a measurement of lakes called the trophic state index (TSI). The proposed change would lower the threshold used to define whether a lake is impaired.

“Essentially, the TSI measurement relates to the amount of algae in the water and to water clarity. Very simply, we use it to identify aesthetically objectionable qualities in water; for example, whether a lake might be too green or too brown to be used by the public for swimming,” said VanGorp.

- Increasing the number of years monitoring data that will be used in establishing water quality reports and impaired waters list in Iowa from two years to three years.

Comments on the proposed changes will be taken by the DNR until Dec. 1., 2003. Comments can be provided to Chris VanGorp or John Olson, Iowa Department of Natural Resources, Wallace State Office Building, Des Moines, Iowa 50319-0034 or by e-mail at chris.vangorp@dnr.state.ia.us or john.olson@dnr.state.ia.us.

Additional information on the proposed methodology changes are available at www.iowadnr.com/water/tmdlwqa/tmdl/publicnotice.html or by calling VanGorp at (515) 281-4791 or Olson at (515) 281-8905.

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MANY PRODUCERS FILE MANURE MANAGEMENT PLANS

DES MOINES –About 51 animal producers have taken advantage of an opportunity to avoid a penalty by filing overdue manure management plans (MMP) in September.

“We’re very pleased because this is a good start on getting plans from the producers out there who must file MMPs, but haven’t yet done so,” said Gene Tinker, coordinator of the DNR animal feeding operations program.

Early in September, the DNR offered producers who have never filed a plan the opportunity to avoid a penalty of \$1,500 by submitting the required plan before March 1, 2004.

Tinker said this grace period is only for not having a required plan. However, the grace period does not apply if the DNR identifies a producer with a missing plan as a result of some other action such as a violation for a fish kill or a water quality problem. In those cases a penalty of \$1,500 would still apply.

“This is a great deal for producers and I would encourage anyone who should have an MMP to take advantage of the offer,” Tinker said.

Even so, producers with a late MMP must pay a \$250 filing fee that producers who submitted their plans on time did not have to pay. They are also required to pay indemnity fees and have an MMP based on the phosphorus index sooner than other producers.

Most producers with more than a 500 animal unit capacity in confinement are required to have an MMP on file with the DNR. An animal unit capacity of 500 is equal to 1250 finishing swine, 500 cattle or 357 mature dairy cattle.

Information on calculating animal unit capacity and the DNR MMP forms are available on the DNR Web site at <http://www.state.ia.us/epd/wastewtr/feedlot/manure.htm>.

Producers with more than one site should check with the local DNR field office to see if an MMP is required, even if each facility has less than 500 animal units. Call your local DNR field office at one of the following locations:

- Manchester, 563-927-2640
- Mason City, 641-424-4073
- Spencer, 712-262-4177
- Atlantic, 712-243-1934
- Des Moines, 515-725-0268
- Washington, 319-653-2135

For more information, contact Gene Tinker, Coordinator, 515-281-3103.

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LOW STREAM LEVELS MAY MEAN HARSH WINTER FOR AQUATIC LIFE

DES MOINES — As streams across the state remain low and even dry, the DNR is continuing to monitor stream levels. The low water and drought conditions affecting most of Iowa may have a significant effect on waterfowl and fish as winter approaches.

The DNR has stopped pumping water into some waterfowl areas, including Lake Red Rock, because water is not available.

“The lack of moisture and runoff is impacting many waterfowl areas, including Lake Red Rock and Rathbun, that are normally flooded by these reservoirs holding more water,” said Richard Bishop, chief of the DNR wildlife bureau. “The habitat is not going to be there to provide good hunting for migrating waterfowl.”

Low water levels can also impact fish. Many farm ponds are heading in to the winter extremely low. An early winter could freeze the ponds solid, and an early snowfall could possibly cause significant winter fish kills in many of the ponds. When ponds freeze at a low level and snowfall blocks light into the ponds, preventing photosynthesis, oxygen for fish is limited.

“Most of Iowa’s marginal lakes have aeration systems in place to prevent winter fish kills,” said Martin Konrad, DNR fisheries biologist. “Conditions have been similar over the past two years, but major fish kills have been avoided by mild winters.”

Currently, streams in Iowa are extremely low. The Yellow River at Postville, the Thompson River near Grand River and Kellerton, and the North River by Norwalk are dry. Larger rivers still have flows and will be holding more fish this winter as the fish move downstream to deeper wintering holes in these sustained rivers.

Low conditions also make streams more susceptible to pollution. A spill while water levels are low is potentially deadlier to aquatic life.

“What can solve this problem? A long-term, significant rain that doesn’t cause runoff can recharge the aquifers and get the rivers flowing again,” said Ralph Turkle, environmental engineer senior in the DNR water resource section.

The DNR regulates the use of all groundwater and surface waters throughout the state to protect the public health and welfare of Iowa’s citizens. The DNR has the authority to implement priority water use restrictions if a “triggering event,” or drought, occurs.

“In the last two months, the DNR has restricted certain stream flow irrigators,” said Michael Anderson, environmental engineer senior in the DNR water supply section. “By law, agricultural irrigation ceases at the end of October. Our staff will continue to monitor stream levels and soil moisture levels throughout the winter.”

Contact Michael Anderson at (515) 725-0336 for more information.

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UPCOMING CONFERENCE TO FEATURE DNR SPEAKER

DES MOINES — Wayne Gieselman, head of the DNR’s environmental services, will speak at the upcoming national Environmental Quality and Agriculture conference Nov. 10 to 12 in Des Moines.

Gieselman will cover air quality information and an update of regulations. He will present along with Wayne Robarge of North Carolina State University and Sally Shaver of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.

The conference will address regulatory and environmental impacts of nutrient use and management practices in North America and is aimed at agricultural professionals, producers, academia, and government.

The conference will be held at the Des Moines Marriott, located downtown.

For more information on the conference, contact Marian Maas at (515) 281-8143 or go to <http://www.ctic.purdue.edu/eqa/>.